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A NATIONAL PARK ON THE POTOMAC RIVER

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A NATIONAL PARK ON THE POTOMAC RIVER.

By Amos B. Casselman.

The Government of the United States for some years past has been planning to develop the water power of the Great Falls of the Potomac, and in connection therewith to provide increase in the water supply of the city; coupling together these two projects, of water supply and water power; and it is recognized that some plan for the purpose must be adopted before many years. Development of water power, for the use of the city, and Government, is not an urgent or immediate necessity, and might be long postponed, or dispensed with. But increase in the water supply of the city will become necessary in the near future. So, it is evident that the present is a proper time to consider the subject as one of deep interest to the people of this city, and especially in its relation to the subject of park extension, for the National Capital, for it has an obvious relation to that subject.

A few years ago I gave some study to questions that have some relation to this subject—questions arising from the act of retrocession of 1846, by which the United States gave back to Virginia the whole of Alexandria County; and the feasibility of regaining some part of that territory to the United States, or embracing it in a riverside park, and heretofore I have made the suggestion that in connection with this necessary work that is being planned by the Government there ought to be created a national riverside park, extending from this city to the Great Falls, and embracing both banks of the Potomac; and no doubt all will agree that such a park is much to be desired; especially in view of the Government's interests and property rights, in this region, as part owner of the Great Falls, owner of the Conduit Road, leading from this city to the Great Falls, and the recognized necessity of acquiring additional riverside territory in connection with the proposed water power development.

There are many reasons that might be urged in favor of such a park—reasons unnecessary to elaborate at length. President Taft at one time sought to secure legislation that would restore to the District of Columbia some part of Alexandria County. He gave that up; but in his annual message to Congress, in 1910, he recommended creating a palisades park on the Virginia side of the Potomac, extending from the railroad bridge to the county line at the

Little Falls. Ambassador Bryce also, in a notable address on the subject of Washington City, made some suggestions, and among others that there ought to be a roadway along the crest of the Virginia hills that border and overlook the Potomac, with steps for the preservation of the forest growth that covers these neighboring hills. My suggestion goes further than the recommendation of President Taft. If there is to be a park on the riverside it ought not to stop at the Little Falls. It ought to be a national park, extending to the Great Falls and including territory on both sides of the river.

The river region from this city to the Great Falls is one of unusual scenic features which make it peculiarly suited to become a great natural park, located as it is in such proximity to the National Capital. It would be difficult to find a counterpart for this picturesque region. There is nothing like it in proximity to any other great American city. Ambassador Bryce, in his address, said: "No European city has so noble a cataract in its vicinity as the Great Falls of the Potomac," and that it "would be almost an ingratitude to Providence and to history and to the men who planted the city here if you did not use the advantages that you here enjoy." And since the Government in the near future will be compelled to enter upon some plan of developing the water power or water supply of the river, at great expense, an expense of $15,000,000, according to the estimates of the engineers, it ought to include in its plans the preservation of the scenic features of this picturesque region and create here at the Capital a national riverside park.

The latest plan of the engineers provides for a lake above the city, to be created by the construction of a high dam at the Little Falls, the lake thus created extending a distance of 9 or 10 miles to the foot of the Great Falls, and submerging an area of about 3,000 acres, to be acquired by the Government at an estimated cost of $1,500,000.

The Government is not committed to the plan for a lake or to any of the several plans that have been suggested. Opinions may differ as to the advisability of the plan for a great artificial lake and dam just above the city. But whatever plan may be adopted it should include provision for the preservation of the scenic features of that region and its inclusion in the parking system of the Capital.

In any plan for a park at the Great Falls, a necessary feature would be a bridge spanning the river at that point. There ought to be a bridge there in any event, to accommodate the many visitors and sight-seers who are attracted to the place by its scenic and historic character. There are electric railroads from this city to the Falls, on both sides of the river. But there is no means of crossing

except in a rowboat, when the stage of the water will permit of that method of crossing. If there were a bridge at the falls connecting with the Conduit Road on this side, and the Leesburg Pike on the opposite side of the river, the route from this city soon would become a popular and famous driveway for automobiles; every automobile tourist, visiting the city from distant points, would include the Great Falls as one of the points of interest to be visited. The bridge and connecting boulevards would bring the falls into closer relations with this city, as well as with Mount Vernon with which it is united in historic association. The great man who lies buried at Mount Vernon is associated in history with the Great Falls, by his having engineered the cutting of the canals around the Great and Little Falls, the first canals ever dug in the United States. They give to the place an historic interest. Gen. Washington, I believe, manifested a deeper interest in this project to circumnavigate the falls by means of a canal, and thus make the upper Potomac an important waterway than in any other civic enterprise, except only the location and planning of the National Capital.

The plans of the engineers for developing water power have in view only a practical commercial object. It is no part of their plans to provide for a park in connection with the power development. That is beyond the scope of their instructions. Whether there is to be a great riverside national park, as a feature of this proposed development, will depend on the degree of public interest manifested. For if there is a lack of public interest or of public desire for such a park it can not be expected that Congress will originate measures and make the large appropriations necessary for the purpose.

Some of the great parks of this country owe their existence to private initiative and private philanthropy. Many instances could be cited. Shaw's Garden at St. Louis, one of the beautiful parks of that city, is, I believe, the gift of a gentleman whose name it bears. A great and beautiful park within the city of Cleveland is the gift of Mr. Rockefeller. In the New York Times of January 7 it is stated that John D. Rockefeller, jr., will soon present to New York City a tract of 57 acres within that city to form a part of the second largest park in the city, and for which he paid $5,000,000.

A recent and notable instance of a great park created in part by private philanthropy in cooperation with the State is that of the Interstate Palisades Park on the Hudson above New York City, embracing territory in the two States of New York and New Jersey. Many unsuccessful efforts had been made to secure cooperative action and legislation by the two States to create a riverside park that would preserve the palisades that were being defaced by the operation of the quarries. But it required private initiative and private

philanthropy to inaugurate a successful movement for the purpose. Pierpont Morgan was the first to make a donation of $125,000, afterwards increasing it to $500,000, for the purpose. It was proposed, finally, that the wealthy men and women interested should raise a fund of $2,500,000, on condition that the State of New York should appropriate a like sum and the State of New Jersey a proportionate sum for the purpose, and this was done. Mrs. Harriman contributed a million dollars and 10,000 acres of land, Mr. Rockefeller $500,000, and a number of others $50,000 each, including Mrs. Russell Sage, Mr. Munsey, Mr. George W. Perkins, and others. The creation of such a park was of course the work of several years. A joint park commission was created by the two States in 1900, and the park was formally opened to the public nine years later—in 1909.

In an editorial in the New York Sun, just before the late election, urging an affirmative vote on a proposed appropriation of $10,000,000 for park purposes in the State, allusion is made especially to the Palisades Park and its great benefits to the people of New York. In this editorial it is stated that during the summer of 1916, a million and half persons visited the park, and that at once place 5,000 boy scouts enjoyed the camping privileges of the park.

It will be seen readily why I allude especially to this Palisades Park, on the Hudson, and to the methods that were adopted as necessary to secure it, by enlisting the aid and support of wealthy philanthropists of New York and New Jersey.

It is because the conditions here, not very unlike those at New York, invite similar methods and similar appeals to philanthropy to secure a national riverside park here on the Potomac, embracing territory in the neighboring States of Virginia and Maryland, embracing the rare scenery of the Great Falls; a park that in the years to come, when fully developed, will add to the fame and beauty of the parking system of the capital.

In recent years there has developed a growing interest in Washington City as a beautiful capital and a desire and purpose to make it one of the most beautiful in the world; and this interest is not merely local. It is felt and manifested throughout the country and finds expression almost daily on the part of citizens and societies representing all sections of the country; and there is no reason to doubt that the methods that were adopted, and that enlisted the support of wealthy philanthropists in securing the Palisades Park at New York could be adopted here with equal success. What was accomplished there in a large way could be repeated here in a smaller way, for no great or large philanthropy would be necessary for the purpose here—nothing like the great amount secured at New York.

One specific suggestion I have made is that funds might be contributed to put a bridge at the Great Falls. That would seem an appropriate and effective means of inaugurating a movement for the purpose. A bridge there, with connecting boulevards and driveways and bridle paths would reveal and familiarize and make accessible many of the hidden beauties of that picturesque region that are now virtually inaccessible. I make this suggestion only because as a comparatively small philanthropy it would seem the most appropriate means of centering and crystallizing popular and official sentiment in favor of a park.

The suggestion for philanthropic initiative to secure a national park here at the capital is made because it is evident that a successful movement for the purpose can not be inaugurated in any other way.

The purpose of the Government some day, in some way, to develop the water power of the river has been under discussion, intermittently, for many years. As long ago as 1898 a Senate committee recommended the immediate acquisition of the sole ownership of the Great Falls. Ten years later, in 1908, plans of development were suggested by the officials under instructions of the District Commissioners. In 1913 Congress directed surveys and a report which were made by Col. Langfitt, who recommended the plans, already referred to, for a high dam and lake above the Little Falls. Within the past few months a board of Army engineers, designated by Secretary Baker, has given a qualified approval to the Langfitt plans, but recommended that the matter should be made the subject of further thorough study. So nothing has been decided, and the one thing that is clear is that the Government is not ready at this time to take any important action or adopt or commit itself to any definite plan of development.

And hence the conclusion that if there is to be any action in the near future toward securing a national park here, as suggested, it must be from individual effort on the part of the people who are interested in the welfare of the city, and not from any initiative that can be expected from the Government.

There are in this city, and elsewhere among those who are interested in its growth and development, social and financial leaders who, if they would consent to actively interest themselves in a movement for the purpose, could quickly secure the voluntary contribution of funds necessary; and with such initiative there is no doubt the Government would respond and cooperate and hasten its plans in the adoption of measures necessary for the purpose.

There is no better way, and perhaps no other way, to enlist the support of the Government and hasten its plans than through private philanthropy on the part of those who are capable of initiating a movement in that manner. There is a rare opportunity for a

comparatively small philanthropy to inaugurate a great movement, one that will enlist both popular and governmental support and result in creating a great park for the Capital.

Summarizing briefly my suggestions, the main proposition, that there ought to be here a national riverside park embracing the beautiful and picturesque scenery of the Great Falls and the riverside, would seem to require no argument. To those who are familiar with this region it makes its own eloquent appeal.

So the question is not whether we should have such a park, but whether there is any feasible plan by which it can be secured. It can not be secured by waiting and relying on Congress to provide for it. The people of Washington have been waiting 25 years for the proposed memorial bridge, and must still wait no one knows how many years longer.

I do not say this in criticism of the Government or of Congress. Everyone knows how impossible it is for Congress to do all that its Members would like to do or feel ought to be done. Appropriations for urgent and necessary purposes and for improvements more or less necessary throughout the wide domain of the United States pile up and exceed the revenues, and it is said that at this time the Government is confronted or threatened with a deficit of $300,000,000, and I suppose Congress is studying to devise new methods of taxation to meet this deficit. Under these conditions it would be idle to ask or expect any large appropriation for a bridge or a park.

But there are some things that can be done by the people here without waiting on Congress. Put a bridge at the Great Falls, or inaugurate some other philanthropy designed to initiate a movement for a great national park and Congress will follow that lead, and by this means you can enlist the support of the Government. An association formed for the purpose, a Great Falls national park association, could do many things. It could cause surveys to be made with maps and illustrations showing the area and outlines of the territory available and suitable for the purpose. It could, I have no doubt, secure from Congress an appropriation of the small amount sufficient for such survey. It could, above all, insure united effort and enlist the support of all who are interested, which would mean all the people of Washington, and a great many elsewhere.

Aside from other considerations, the parking system of the capital ought to extend to the Virginia side of the river, opposite the city, and embrace territory in what was intended to be and was originally a part of the seat of Government. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that there is an area of at least five or six hundred acres of shallow river bed between this city and Alexandria, on the Virginia side, beyond the deep channel, that can be and probably at some future time will be reclaimed, filled in, and included in the parking system

of the city. As part of the river bed, it belongs to the United States. A portion now between Analostan Island and the railroad bridge is being partitioned off by a wall that separates it from the deep channel and will be filled in and reclaimed from the river bed. A much larger area that can be thus reclaimed lies below the bridge, on the Virginia side.

The growth and transformation of this city since Alexandria County was given back to Virginia in 1846 have been marvelous and wholly beyond the conception of the men of that day. No doubt the developments of the next 70 years will be equally great—perhaps beyond what we of to-day could anticipate.

It will not be very many decades until the city will have a million population, when it will be too late to acquire territory for a riverside park or preserve the forest growth that now covers and beautifies these neighboring Virginia hills. The time to do that is now, when the Government is planning to acquire territory necessary for water-power purposes. Nor is there much time for delay, for that portion of Virginia immediately opposite the city is being built up and utilized rapidly for residential and other private uses. And if the people of this day have that regard which each generation should have for those who are to come after they will initiate measures that ultimately will secure for this capital a great park, national in character, embracing and preserving the rare natural scenery of the riverside and the Great Falls, a park for the recreation of the teeming millions of future generations, with boathouses and bridges and ferries, bridle paths and camping grounds, a park for the multitude worthy of a great capital.

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